



Growing Healthy Food, People
and Communities

Healthy Garden Workshop Series

Rain Barrels July 31, 2009

Rain Barrels Help Your Garden – and Local Streams

Rain Barrels collect rainwater runoff from your roof, enabling you to water your vegetables, flowers, shrubs and trees. By using rainwater from your roof, you can keep your lawn greener and your garden lusher in the hot, dry summer months. You also will save money by reducing water usage. Stormwater runoff is rain that falls on the hard, paved surfaces and roofs of our urban regions. When rain falls on a roof, it heats up and carries pollutants into the street and then into stormwater pipes which then discharge the stormwater directly into streams. Stormwater pollution from urban areas is the fastest-growing source of Chesapeake Bay pollution. Rain barrels and other rainwater harvesting methods (rain gardens, native plants, etc) really can help clean up the environment.

Selecting a Rain Barrel

Most rain barrels are comparable in most features. When selecting a rain barrel, consider four things: **size, cost, aesthetics and intake area:**

- **Size:** 75-80 gallon models help capture more runoff, while 50 or 55 gallons models can be better suited for smaller areas.
- **Cost:** Barrels range from about \$15 (supplies to build your own barrel) to \$200. Choose one that fits your budget and time constraints. Good barrels can be found at many prices.
- **Aesthetics:** They come in many colors. Consider whether you want your barrel to blend in (dark green or brown), or stand out to draw attention.
- **Intake Area:** Keeping the intake area clear of debris can take a lot of maintenance for some in the fall. Consider selecting a barrel with a larger intake area if you have a lot of debris in your gutters that will travel to your rain barrel.

Rain Barrel Equipment and Installation Tips

- a flexible downspout attachment/diverter to attach to the top of the rain barrel;
- a screen covering intake hole to keep out insects and debris;
- cinder blocks or bricks to rest your barrel on for increased stability;
- mosquito “dunks” to put inside the barrel that kill mosquito larvae.
- (you will need many other items if you are creating a barrel from scratch)

Maintaining Your Rain Barrel

- Drain it within 2 days after each storm – attach a hose to the faucet, empty water throughout garden, lawn, grass, trees, scrubs, etc.
- Using and replenishing the mosquito larvicide (mosquito “dunks” or pellets) is also important to prevent your barrel from becoming a breeding ground for disease.
- Keep the screen clear of debris – prevents clogging that otherwise might prevent stormwater from filling your rain barrel.

Shopping for a Rain Barrel

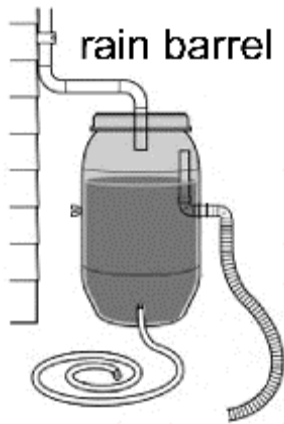
There are many options, the main ones being on-line ordering or buying direct from a local hardware or natural-foods grocery store.

More Information:

Two web sites that provide useful rain barrel tips are:

www.rainscapes.org

<http://www.epa.gov/Region3/p2/what-is-rainbarrel.pdf>



United States Department of Agriculture